



Exploring the Precursors to Organizational Commitment: From a Literature Review to an Integrated Theoretical Model

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Abstract

Various studies have been conducted to ascertain the correlates and antecedents of organizational commitment of the workforce in different sectors. Regardless of the established organizational concerns regarding this vital issue, there are still many areas that still seem to be under-researched or discounted. Most of the existing literature focuses on commitment in a narrower sense rather than investigating it in a holistic manner. This paper works on developing an integrative model of organizational commitment and attempts to look at various reasons of continuous employee commitment to an organization. The study involved an extensive review of a number of related surveys and studies using structured key word approach. The main objective of the study is to assess organizational commitment through development of a theoretical model based on social exchange theory.

Most of the existing literature reveals that an organizational commitment is a function of interaction of many diversely intertwined factors. These forces primarily include factors pertaining to an organization, individual or job characteristics. These may also contain other factors resulting in employees' organizational commitment through relational exchange mechanisms. Relational exchange mechanisms are simply the interplays of employees' perception towards organizational justice, leader-member exchange, psychological contract adherence, trust and organizational support. These factors collectively generate psychological capital culminating in an employee commitment. A rather nascent field of study, increased comprehension of organizational commitment can enable organizations to gain competitive advantage by influencing diverse work outcomes positively.

Keywords: *Organizational commitment, employee loyalty, organizational culture, relational exchange, human resource management, psychological contract*

Introduction

Consumers and employees including the management will always remain the key drivers of any organization. In the modern globally integrated economies, organizations constantly face challenges to ward off recession, fierce competition, shortened product life cycle, obsolescence, and information technology advances. Survival of any organization hinges on the valuable customers and loyal employees. But amongst both, reliance on a loyal and committed workforce is a pre-requisite to success (Kipkebut, 2010). Organizations are constantly struggling with increased attritions and are looking for development of increased and sustainable employees' commitment (Dwivedi, Kaushik & Luxmi, 2014).

The workforce landscape is changing day by day and organizations are faced with a challenge of management of such a diverse workforce. Most organizations have a

multigenerational work force starting from the baby boomers, generation (Gen) X and Gen Y or the millennial. Major workforce today in many services industry is the Gen Y. They all have differing aspirations; needs and understanding of organizational connect and culture. A study of generations done on behalf of the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) by Kimberly, McDonald and Linda (2006) found that age is the most prevalent barrier to success and organizational commitment for young professionals. The research revealed that many individuals find their youth as an obstacle in terms of gaining notice and being respected. Employee commitment is also a concern to replace the retiring baby boomer Gen employees, including transition management of middle and top level management pool. Organizations need to create, develop and preserve a repository of talent pool of new managers (Guerrero & Herrbach, 2009). In this challenging situation, organizational commitment is considered vital for retaining and attracting well qualified employees. Only contented and committed employees will be keen to continue their relationship with a company and make substantial effort towards realizing its objectives (Nagar, 2012).

Managers need to understand that committed employees add value beyond their direct and individual performance (Conway & Briner, 2012), as committed employees are instrumental in creating a healthy organization (Srivastava, 2013). Commitment has been an area of interest among practitioners and academic researchers due to a belief that it has a direct effect on the organizational performance. This paper endeavours to analyze various studies and identify key factors determining employees' commitment to an organization. In specific it will look at the organizational reputation, and individual role and satisfaction, as key factors affecting employees' retention. Organizational commitment plays a central role to both these dilemmas and therefore remains the prime focus of this paper.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Theoretical constructs. Four concepts figure prominently in researchers' deliberations concerning this study. These include organizational commitment, Harvard framework, human resource management (HRM) and human capital management. In the past 20 years, there have been many research efforts to discover and comprehend the nature, antecedents, and consequences of organizational commitment (Kumar & Bakshi, 2010). Researchers have exhibited an overpowering curiosity on three major employee outcomes, i.e., organizational commitment, job satisfaction and individual performance (Dhammika, Ahmad, & Sam, 2012). Organizational commitment has been mostly defined as an individual's level of identifying himself with an organization and has been deliberated across different academic fields (Wang, Tsai, & Lin, 2013).

Organizational commitment was also referred to as the relative strength of an individual's identification with an organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Allen and Meyer (1990) advocated three-component model of commitment namely affective, continuance and normative commitment integrating various conceptualizations. The affective commitment denotes employees' emotional attachment, identification and involvement in the organization while continuance commitment discusses commitment based on the costs that employees ascribe with leaving the organization. Third one, the normative commitment mentions employees' feelings of obligation to stay with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Harvard Framework (Boxall, 1994), developed by Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) is based on the belief that the personnel management depends on managerial viewpoint of employees involvement in an organization towards their goals. Key to this is the need of a central philosophy or a strategic vision in the overall human resource management (HRM). Beer and his colleagues believed that pressures on the organizations demand a broader, more strategic perspective with regard to the organization's human resources (Armstrong, 2006). Guest (1990) had written that one of the HRM policy goals was the achievement of high commitment. It was noted by Karen (1995) that human resource (HR) policy will be most effective if it is driven by mutually consistent policies promoting

commitment and willingness in employees to act in the interests of the organization's pursuit of excellence.

But this emphasis on commitment has been criticized from the earliest days of HRM (Armstrong, 2006). Fowler (1987) had stated that the concept of commitment was predicated on a complete identification of employees with the aims and values of the business but on the company's terms. Additional fillip of employees' organizational commitment came from the concept of human capital. This concept gained ground after advocacy by Beer et al. (1984, 1990) that people should be regarded as assets rather than variable costs. HRM philosophy advanced by Karen (1987) expected management to treat HR as valuable assets and a source of competitive advantage. Armstrong and Baron (2002) stated that employees with their collective skills, abilities and experience, make a significant contribution to organizational success and generate organizational commitment.

Organizational factors and commitment. The extant literature vis-à-vis commitment has been reviewed in context to the HRM practices and the culture prevailing in an organization.

HRM practices. There has been an increasing interest in the degree to which HR systems augment organizational effectiveness. HR practices play a dominant role in shaping organizational commitment and it can be actively influenced by the organizations through the deployment of best practices (Koster, 2011). Qiao, Khilji, and Wang (2009), in their study conducted among Chinese employees indicated that if an organization offers progressive HRM systems, level of employees' commitment increases. The formal HR practices can be deployed as imperative tools to increase commitment and performance within an organization. A fair appraisal system makes them to work efficiently by generating a sense of ownership. It also assists the employees to motivate themselves either financially or non-financially leading them to have higher commitment (Deepa, Palaniswamy, & Kuppusamy, 2014).

A study conducted by Kipkebut (2010) reveals that all the HRM practices have a significant positive impact on affective commitment. The study also found that training opportunities, job security, distributive justice, participation in decision making and career development were common precursors of affective commitment (Kipkebut, 2010). Training as an HR practice is instrumental in enhancing the affective organizational commitment of employees (Newman, Thanacoody, & Hui, 2011). Another study in hospitality industry in Turkey corroborated that all the dimensions of training namely motivation for training, means of providing opportunities, sense of being supported and perceived benefits positively affected commitment among the employees (Bulut & Culha, 2010). In People's Republic of China, the development opportunities and care for employees with special needs were found to be associated with perceived organizational support (Zhang, Farh, & Wang, 2012). Awasthy and Gupta (2010) conducted a study among Indian executives working in multinational companies whereby they explored that value driven and employee friendly HR practices have a positive impact on organizational commitment in many Anglo-American multinational companies.

Organizational culture. It is a critical component that binds an organization together (Ogbonna & Harris, 1998). It has definite influence on commitment of employees that is predominantly sensitive to trust, authenticity, confrontation, and collaboration (Dwivedi et al., 2014). The findings indicate that organizations that focus on outcomes rather than processes have more committed employees. Consequently, managers should accentuate achievement, action and results, along with having superior expectations for competitiveness and performance. (Su, Baird, & Blair, 2009). Studies (Su et al., 2009, Hemerling & Kilmann, 2013, & Dwivedi et al., 2014) also indicate that a high-performance culture requires more than a standard set of attributes for it to engage employees to the organization. Hemerling & Kilmann (2013) gave two distinct characteristics defining increased organizational commitment:

- Employees' behaviour aligned with the organization's strategy. This promotes the organization's purpose and goals and the strategy designed to realize them.

- Employees are involved and committed to their work, purpose and goals of their organization, and are willing to go the extra mile. This is defined by a set of “good” behaviors, manifested as high employee engagement.

Individual characteristics and commitment. The review of literature incorporated studies pertaining to employees’ cultural values, their dispositional characteristics and their demographic characteristics.

Employees’ cultural values. Geert Hofstede’s Individualism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance as employees’ cultural values have an effect on affective commitment. Impact of masculine values has been observed on the development of low alternative/continuance commitment (García-Cabrera & García-Soto, 2012). Participation satisfaction as HRM practice and affective commitment has a positive but insignificant association for the employees high in uncertainty avoidance while for employees low in masculinity/femininity, high in individualism/collectivism and low in power distance, positive and significant relationship was observed between participation satisfaction and normative commitment (Singh & Mohanty, 2011).

In a study conducted across India among the telecommunication services, employees working in public sector undertaking exhibited direct relationship between pay satisfaction and organizational commitment. Further, the relationship between the two is moderated by employees’ cultural values revealing a positive significant impact of pay satisfaction on normative commitment for employees low in masculinity/femininity and in power distance. Nevertheless, no significant moderating impact has been observed between the relationship of pay satisfaction with organizational commitment for employees low/ high in individualism/ collectivism and uncertainty avoidance (Singh & Mohanty, 2011).

Employees’ dispositional characteristics. Research on organizational commitment has covered a comprehensive range of topics but less attention has been given on the role of dispositions in shaping organizational commitment (Kumar & Bakhshi, 2010). Managers with internal locus of control are more content with their jobs causing enhanced level of organizational commitment as they possess greater ability to handle stressful situations effectively (Srivastava, 2013). Another study shows that professional efficacy and cynicism were found to be significant antecedents of organizational commitment i.e. a lower level of professional efficacy and higher level of cynicism reduced organizational commitment.

Cynicism was observed to be stronger than professional efficacy in elucidating organizational commitment (Jung & Kim, 2012). Through an exhausting framework of five-factor model of personality, Kumar and Bakhshi (2010) explored relationships between openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism with all components of organizational commitment. They found that openness to experience is negatively related to normative commitment while conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism were found to be positively related to continuance commitment.

Employees’ demographic characteristics. Employees’ commitment also varies based on an employee’s age. Studies reveal that younger employees exhibit considerably lower organizational commitment than the employees of the higher age brackets (Su et al., 2009). Age was observed to be significantly related with distributive justice and organizational commitmentsignifying that as employees’ age, they attach higher importance to the objective distribution of resources in their organization. Justice dimensions were also found to be substantially associated with perceived organizational support, consequently, an increase in employees’ age established an escalation in both of these relations as well (Mukherjee, 2010). Based on a study conducted by Kipkebut (2010), age and gender were found to have a significant positive impact. It revealed that female administrators and older employees have greater affective attachment to their organizations (Kipkebut, 2010).

Contrary to the age related commitment, study identified age to be correlated with organizational commitment but as a weakest predictor (Mahanta, 2012). Based on study conducted by Nagar (2012), female teachers show a greater degree of commitment towards their organization than male teachers. As per a study conducted by Top and Gider (2013), among nurses and medical secretaries in Turkey, marital status was also found to influence organizational commitment.

Job characteristics and commitment. The extant literatures pertaining to skill variety, degree of autonomy, task identity, feedback on performance and customer focus have been reviewed in context to commitment.

Skill variety. Taghavil and Gholami (2015) explain skill variety as ‘degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work, which involve the use of a number of different skills and talents of the employees’ (p. 1121). A study in Qatar showed that higher degree of skill variety is likely to yield higher amounts of commitment.

However the levels of association are found to be weak between the two. Consequently, if employees discover the opportunity to employ a variety of job skills, this will escalate their job satisfaction and their involvement in their jobs and in turn will enhance their commitment to the organization (Al-Esmael & Faisal, 2012).

Degree of autonomy. In the same study in Qatar by Al-Esmael and Faisal, (2012), moderate positive correlation was observed between degree of autonomy and each of affective and normative commitment while no significant relationship was established with continuance commitment.

Hence, the more autonomy employees gained, the more they were contented with their jobs and the higher were their levels of organizational commitment (Al-Esmael & Faisal, 2012). The salespersons’ affective commitment is influenced by their degree of job liking, selling skills, and empowerment indicating the impact of selling skills on affective commitment is higher while empowerment is high (Simintiras, Watkins, Ifie, & Georgakas, 2012).

Task identity. It is the degree to which the job requires completion of an identifiable piece of work from start to finish with a visible outcome (Taghavil & Gholami, 2015). Moderate positive correlation was established between task identity and each of the affective and normative commitment, although weak relationship was observed with continuance commitment. Hence, the more employees believed that their jobs were delineated and clear, the more they were committed to the organization (Al-Esmael & Faisal, 2012).

Feedback on performance. The strongest correlation was established between feedback on performance and affective commitment which directs that employees may experience higher amounts of attachment and loyalty if they are furnished with higher amounts of feedback from their supervisors and companies to improve their performance. Although only a weak relationship was found between feedback on performance and continuance commitment (Al-Esmael & Faisal, 2012).

Customer focus. Organizational commitment is also dependent upon job satisfaction in acquiring and retaining customers. Customer experience is aligned to the employee’s experience and linked to organizational commitment towards both. Bjørnland et al. (2015) in their study on customer experience found that word of mouth recommendations are keys to acquiring and retaining customers. This strategy also reflects upon the corporate reputation. To holistically measure word-of-mouth recommendation, companies use BCG’s Brand Advocacy Index (BAI), measure of customers’ experience that is highly correlated with growth. BAI measures customer experience by means of actual recommendations among customers, noncustomers, and former customers.

Wong (2010) in research with title "the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction toward affective commitment" investigated relation between job characteristics, job

satisfaction and affective commitment. Result of analysis shows that both job characteristic and job satisfaction are statistically significant related to affective commitment.

Relational exchange mechanisms and commitment. The extant literature concerning leader-member exchange, organizational justice, perceived organizational support, psychological contracts violation, organizational trust and psychological capital vis-à-vis commitment have been reviewed.

Leader-member exchange. The followers' organizational commitment is steered by emotional bond with their leaders and organization (Pradhan, & Pradhan, 2015). The employees' emotional ties are associated with normative commitment. Emotional attachment with colleagues account for passive continuance commitment whereas the same with a supervisor is related with affective and value commitment (Wang, 2008). Organizations can nurture affective commitment not only by assisting employees to gain support, but also by facilitating employees to offer support (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008).

A study of expatriates at MNC subsidiaries in China reinforced the associations between parent company and local subsidiary perceived organizational support, leader-member exchange and the expatriates' affective commitment. The study revealed that leader-member exchange mediates the relationship between both parent company and perceived organizational support and affective commitment. (Liu & Ipe, 2010). There is strong negative correlation between numerous dimensions of toxic leadership namely abusiveness, promoting inequity, indecisiveness, divisiveness and Organization Commitment. It signifies that employees' ability to derive meaning out of work and their commitment is greatly weakened when leaders are less cordial at the workplace (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013).

Organizational justice. Fairness perceptions of employees regarding organizational actions bring positive work outcomes. Organizational justice directly impacts attitudinal variables like the job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Totawar & Nambudiri, 2014). It has a considerable influence on employees' organizational commitment (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009; Patrick, 2012). Leow, Bahron, and Kong, (2011) pointed out significant positive relationship between organizational justice and commitment. Perceived distributive and procedural justice positively impact employees' organizational commitment (Ölçer, 2015). Furthermore, results revealed that interactional justice is more intensely associated with both affective and normative organizational commitment than procedural justice (Ehrhardt, Shaffer, Chiu, & Luk, 2012).

Perceived organizational support. Perceived organizational support signals quality of the social exchange relationship with the firm that is significantly associated with affective commitment, high sacrifice besides low alternatives (Guerrero & Herrbach, 2009). The organizations characterized by higher perceived support are more likely to benefit from higher levels of employees' organizational commitment (Su, Baird, & Blair, 2013; Aggarwal-Gupta, Vohra, & Bhatnagar, 2010; Su et al., 2009; Wu & Liu, 2014; Giauque, Resenterra, & Siggen, 2010; Yadav, 2011). Su et al., (2009) pointed out positive significant impact of perceived organizational support on the organizational commitment. A study in UK established that organizational commitment is considerably influenced by the way the employees view organization-support and management-support rather than job demands (Dick, 2011).

Psychological contracts violation. Organizational and employees' mutual expectations, commitments and their realization are referred to as psychological contract. Shahnawaz and Goswami (2011) studied the influence of psychological contract violation on organizational commitment during economic recession. The results revealed significant effect of breach of psychological contract on affective commitment. In case of continuance commitment and normative commitment, influence of psychological contract violation was relatively higher in private sector than public sector.

Affective commitment declines with the rise in the perception of transactional and relational contract breach as when employees feel betrayed they try to reciprocate by isolating

themselves from the organization (Jafri, 2011). Judy, Martin, and McGoldrick (2003) conducted a study on textile workers to assess whether breaching a contract has implications for employee attitude and behaviour, and ultimately organizational performance. The findings suggested that triggers of violation impinged on employee attitudes but not on behaviour.

Organizational trust. Organizational trust has a multiplier impact on organizational commitment as it has both leading and moderating (Wang et al., 2013). There is a positive relationship between organizational trust and organizational commitment indicating that employees tend to be more committed if trust is highly placed on them (Leow et al., 2011). The top management communication besides employee involvement play a critical role in building high levels of trust. Manager's trust in the organization positively influences job satisfaction and organizational commitment relationship indicating that trust assists in transforming a satisfied employee into a committed employee (Srivastava, 2013). Studies also reveal a significant relationship between propensity to trust and perceived credibility of supervisor, colleagues and organization. As a consequence, organizational commitment can be developed through trust shaped by organizational practices and systems (Nambudiri, 2012). Xeri (2013) in his study in hospital environment found that an employee's perception of fairness regarding organizational policies and procedures have a major impact on organizational commitment.

Psychological capital. Organizational research has used social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) to describe motivations behind employee behaviors and attitudes (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). Social exchange theory involves a series of interactions that are interdependent, contingent on the actions of the other partner in the social relationship, and generate obligations (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Based on the arguments taken from social exchange theory, Totawar and Nambudiri, (2014) explored causal impact of justice on commitment and elucidated it through the mediating effect of psychological capital. It acts as a conduit between organizationally controlled factor and organizational commitment (Totawar & Nambudiri, 2014). It was also found that employees who experience more negative emotions from failure have lower affective commitment to their organizations (Shepherd, Patzelt, & Wolfe, 2011).

The available literature and research validate the existence of relational exchange mechanisms that operate in shaping the employees' organizational commitment. Key constructs affecting organizational commitment are the organizational factors, individual characteristics, job characteristics and relational exchange mechanisms. Based on these studies, the paper proposes a theoretical model of organizational commitment.

Theoretical Model of Organizational Commitment

Over 80 papers studied for this model, repeatedly identified correlates and antecedents of organizational commitment. Important factors were skimmed out in the paper, to create an integrative model of organizational commitment. Most of this model is based on the premise of social exchange theory. The organizational commitment is a function of interacting intertwined factors viz., organizational factors, individual factors, job characteristics, and extra-organizational factors resulting in employees' organizational commitment through relational exchange mechanisms.

These factors have been discussed in the paper in greater detail. The final factor namely relational exchange mechanisms is interplay of employees' perception towards a number of factors. These include organizational justice, leader-member exchange, psychological contract violation, trust and organizational support that collectively generate psychological capital culminating in employee commitment. Integrative in the model will be size of an organization or the firm, service tenure, nature of occupation and level of position of the employees. These are inherent control variables and will influence the integrated model. Model given in figure 1 has control factors viz., size of an organization, service tenure, and nature of occupation and level of position of the employees interacting with other factors. These include organizational, individual,

job and extra organizational factors on one hand and relational exchange mechanism on the other. Processed and conclusive output will be organizational commitment in affective, normative or continuous mode.

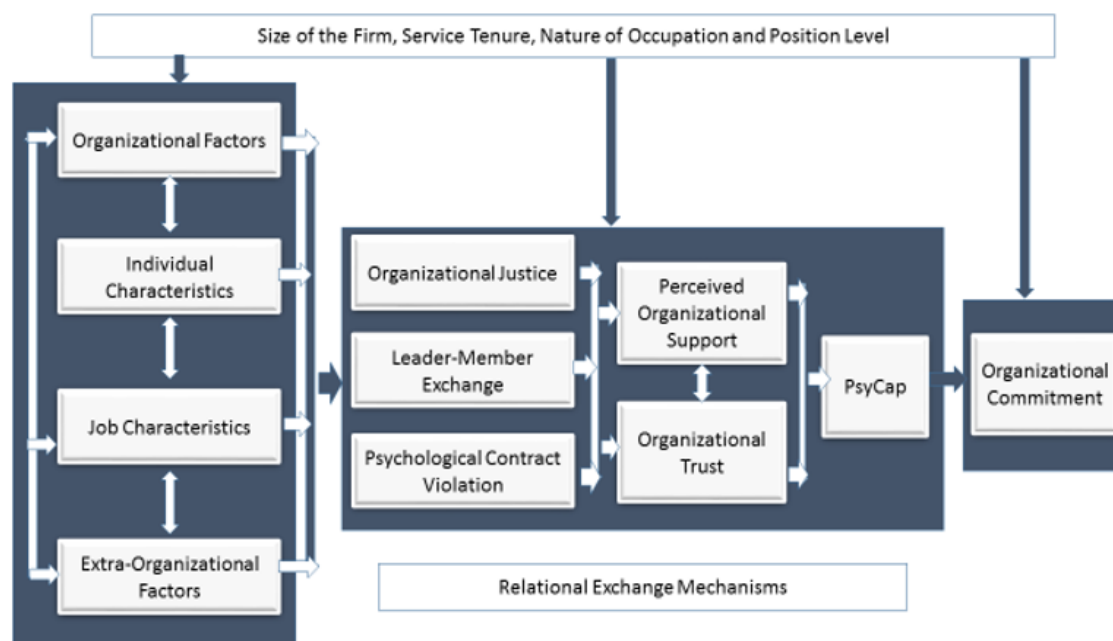


Figure 1: Integrated Model of Organizational Commitment.
Source: Authors' own representation.

Directions for Further Research

The critical linkages between the diverse relational exchange mechanisms can be investigated further to appreciate the mediating roles of organizational trust and perceived organizational support. This model can be tested empirically in diverse contextual settings to investigate cross-national variation. Several recent research studies, have advocated positive association between job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Su et al., 2009; Leow et al., 2011; Nagar, 2012; Mahanta, 2012; Kanwar, Singh, & Kodwani, 2012; Froese & Xiao, 2012; Rahaman, 2012; Su et al., 2013; Top & Gider, 2013; Srivastava, 2013). Consequently, job satisfaction can be studied as moderating variable between psychological capital and organizational commitment strengthening the relationship between the two.

Additionally, emotional exhaustion or stress have a significant negative impact on affective organizational commitment as outcomes of an unbalanced social exchange relationship between the individual and the organization (Tourigny, Baba, Han, & Wang, 2013; Hollet-Haudebert, Mulki, & Fournier, 2011) which can be further investigated to develop a better comprehension regarding employees' organizational commitment.

Conclusion

The paper provides a comprehensive overview of organizational commitment and establishes its linkages to important factors. The factors include organizational factors, individual characteristics, job characteristics and relational exchange mechanisms. It also explored its precursors that bind employees to their organization through development of holistic model. The model has been based on the social exchange theory. Control factors like size of an organization, service tenure, and nature of occupation and level of position of the employees interact with organizational and individual/job factors and relational exchange mechanism. Processed and conclusive output will be organizational commitment in affective, normative or continuous mode. The contribution of this paper lies in aggregating diverse yet intertwined antecedents shaping employees' organizational commitment. The better comprehension of organizational commitment will enable organizations to gain competitive advantage by influencing diverse work outcomes positively. The paper attempts to offer insights into directions for future research as well.

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